

The evolution of social capital in cooperatives in post-social countries

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Social capital "is the 'gluey stuff' that binds individuals to groups, groups to organisations, citizens to societies" (Labonte, 1999). In this context, there are two ways to view the role of social capital in relation to cooperatives. First the role of social capital in interaction of cooperatives and their social and economic environment. Secondly, how social capital affects the performance of cooperatives. Cooperatives may generate social capital that is extended to their social environment. On the other end, the existence of social capital in the socio-economic milieu can affect cooperative development (Saz-Gil, et al, 2021). Cooperatives actually can create social capital which is spread in the community (Sabatini, et al, 2014; Bauer, et al, 2012; Majee and Hoyt, 2010). Similarly, the growth of cooperatives can contribute with economies of scale and income, especially to small farmers and communities (Simpson and Rapone 2000). It is also found that as cooperatives evolve, social capital changes (Deng et al., 2021).

Agricultural cooperatives in post-socialistic countries often fail to justify their purpose. Lack of trust and social capital are plausible reasons (Tuna & Karantininis, 2021). To our knowledge the evolution of cooperative social capital, especially in post-socialist countries has not been examined. In this paper we use primary survey data from a number of cooperatives in the Republic of North Macedonia (RoNM) to examine whether social capital in RoNM farmer cooperatives evolves over time. Furthermore we examine how this contributes to improve farmer performance We use social network analysis and compare old with younger cooperatives with respect to their social capital.

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